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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet providing general information about learning disabilities is presented in both English and Spanish versions. It begins with the federal definition of learning disabilities and a discussion of its implications followed by estimates of incidence. Typical characteristics of students with learning disabilities are then summarized as are these students' typical academic problems. Educational implications and suggested teaching strategies are briefly discussed. Finally, three print resources and six relevant organizations are listed. (DB)

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General Information About

LEARNING DISABILITIES

✧ Definition ✧

The regulations for Public Law (P.L.) 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly P.L. 94-142, the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA), define a learning disability as a "disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations."

The Federal definition further states that learning disabilities include "such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia." According to the law, learning disabilities do not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. Definitions of learning disabilities also vary among states.

Having a single term to describe this category of children with disabilities reduces some of the confusion, but there are many conflicting theories about what causes learning disabilities and how many there are. The label "learning disabilities" is all-embracing; it describes a syndrome, not a specific child with specific problems. The definition assists in classifying children, not teaching them. Parents and teachers need to concentrate on the individual child. They need to observe both how and how well the child performs, to assess strengths and weaknesses, and invent ways to help each child learn. It is important to remember that there is a high degree of interrelationship and overlapping among the areas of learning. Therefore, children with learning disabilities may exhibit a combination of characteristics.

These problems may mildly, moderately, or severely impair the learning process.

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✧ Incidence ✧

Many different estimates of the number of children with learning disabilities have appeared in the literature (ranging from 1% to 30% of the general population). In 1987, the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities concluded that 5% to 10% is a reasonable estimate of the percentage of persons affected by learning disabilities. The U.S. Department of Education (1991) reported that 4.66% of all school aged children received special education services for learning disabilities and that in the 1989-90 school year over 2 million children with learning disabilities were served. Differences in estimates perhaps reflect variations in the definition.

✧ Characteristics ✧

Learning disabilities are characterized by a significant difference in the child's achievement in some areas, as compared to his or her overall intelligence.

Students who have learning disabilities may exhibit a wide range of traits, including problems with reading comprehension, spoken language, writing, or reasoning ability. Hyperactivity, in-attention, and perceptual coordination problems may also be associated with learning disabilities. Other traits that may be present include a variety of symptoms, such as uneven and unpredictable test performance, perceptual impairments, motor disorders, and behaviors such as impulsiveness, low tolerance for fustruation, and problems in handling day-to-day social interactions and situations.

Learning disabilities may occur in the following academic areas:

1. Spoken language: Delays, disorders, or discrepancies in listening and speaking;
2. Written language: Difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling;
3. Arithmetic: Difficulty in performing arithmetic functions or in comprehending basic concepts;

4. Reasoning: Difficulty in organizing and integrating thoughts; and
5. Organization skills: Difficulty in organizing all facets of learning.

✧ Educational Implications ✧

Because learning disabilities are manifested in a variety of behavior patterns, the Individual Education Program (IEP) must be designed carefully. A team approach is important for educating the child with a learning disability, beginning with the assessment process and continuing through the development of the IEP. Close collaboration among special class teachers, parents, resource room teachers, regular class teachers and others, will facilitate the overall development of a child with learning disabilities.

Some teachers report that the following strategies have been effective with some students who have learning disabilities:

- Capitalize on student's strengths;
- High structure and clear expectations;
- Using short sentences and a simple vocabulary;
- Opportunities for success in a supportive atmosphere to help build self-esteem;
- Flexibility in classroom procedures (e.g., allowing the use of tape recorders for note-taking and test-taking when students have trouble with written language);
- Self-correcting materials, which provide immediate feedback without embarrassment;
- Using computers for drill and practice and teaching word processing;
- Positive reinforcement of appropriate social skills at school and home; and
- Recognizing that students with learning disabilities can greatly benefit from the gift of time to grow and mature.

✧ Resources ✧

"Journal of Learning Disabilities." (Available from PRO-ED, 5341 Industrial Oaks Blvd., Austin TX 78735-8809. Telephone: (512) 982-3142)

Silver, L. (1988). *The misunderstood child: A guide for parents of learning disabled children.* New York, NY: McGraw Hill Book Co. (Available from McGraw Hill, 11 West 19th St., New York, NY 10011.)

Smith, S. (1981). *No easy answers.* New York, NY: Bantam Books. (Available from Bantam, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103. Telephone: 1-800-223-6834.)

✧ Organizations ✧

Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD)
P.O. Box 40303
Overland Park, KS 66204
(913) 492-8755

Division of Learning Disabilities
Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Dr.
Reston, VA 22091
(703) 620-3660

Learning Disabilities Assn. of America (LDA)
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(412) 341-1515
(412) 341-8077

National Center for Learning Disabilities
99 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10016
(212) 687-7211

National Network of Learning Disabled Adults (NNLDA)
808 North 82nd St., #F2
Scottsdale, AZ 85257
(602) 941-5112

Orton Dyslexia Society
724 York Road
Baltimore, MD 21204
(410) 296-0232
(800) 222-3123 (Toll Free)

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Información General Sobre

IMPEDIMENTOS EN EL APRENDIZAJE

✧ Definición ✧

Las regulaciones para la Ley Pública (P.L.) 101-476, el Acta para la Educación de los Individuos con Discapacidades (IDEA), anteriormente P.L. 94-142, el Acta para la Educación de los Impedidos (EHA), define un impedimento en el aprendizaje como un "trastorno en uno o más de los procesos psicológicos básicos involucrados en la comprensión o en el uso del lenguaje, el escribir o hablar, el cual se puede manifestar en una imperfecta habilidad para escuchar, pensar, hablar, leer, escribir, ortografía, o hacer cálculos matemáticos."

La definición Federal dice, además, que los impedimentos en el aprendizaje incluyen "tales condiciones como impedimentos perceptuales, daño al cerebro, disfunción mínima del cerebro, dislexia, y afasia en el desarrollo." De acuerdo a la ley, los impedimentos en el aprendizaje no incluyen los problemas de aprendizaje que principalmente son el resultado de impedimentos visuales, auditivos, o motores; retraso mental; o desventajas ambientales, culturales, o económicas. Las definiciones de los impedimentos en el aprendizaje tambien varían entre los estados.

Para menos confusión se utiliza un sólo término para la descripción de esta categoría de niños, pero existen muchas teorías conflictivas sobre las causas de los impedimentos en el aprendizaje y el número total de éstos. La calificación "impedimentos en el aprendizaje" es un término general; describe un síndrome, no un niño específico con problemas específicos. La definición asiste en la clasificación de niños, no en su aprendizaje. Los padres y profesores deben concentrarse en el niño individual. Necesitan observar cómo y cuán bien trabaja el niño, evaluar sus fortalezas y debilidades, e inventar maneras de ayudar al niño para que éste aprenda. Es importante recordar que existe un alto grado de interrelación y coincidencia en las áreas de aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, los niños con impedimentos en el aprendizaje pueden exhibir una combinación de características.

Estos problemas pueden impedir el proceso de aprendizaje en forma leve, moderada, o severa.

✧ Incidencia ✧

A través del tiempo se han publicado muchos diferentes cálculos aproximados del número total de niños con impedimentos en el aprendizaje (entre 1% a 30% de la población norteamericana). En 1987, el Comité sobre Impedimentos en el Aprendizaje (Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities) concluyó que entre 5% y 10% es una estimación razonable del porcentaje de personas afectadas por los impedimentos en el aprendizaje. El Departamento de Educación de Estados Unidos (1991) informó que 4.66 % de todos los niños de edad escolar recibió servicios de educación especial para impedimentos en el aprendizaje y que en el año escolar de 1989-90 se ayudó a más de 2 millones de niños con impedimentos en el aprendizaje. Las diferencias en estimaciones posiblemente reflejen variaciones en la definición.

✧ Características ✧

Los impedimentos en el aprendizaje se caracterizan por una diferencia significante en los logros del niño en ciertas áreas, en comparación a su inteligencia en general.

Los alumnos que tienen impedimentos en el aprendizaje pueden exhibir una gran variedad de características, incluyendo problemas con la comprensión, en lenguaje, escritura, o habilidad para razonar. La hiperactividad, falta de atención, y problemas en la coordinación y percepción pueden tambien ser asociados con los impedimentos en el aprendizaje. Otras características que pueden estar presentes incluyen una variedad de síntomas, tales como dificultades perceptuales desniveladas e

impredecibles en pruebas de actuación trastornos motores, y comportamientos como la impulsividad, baja tolerancia de las frustraciones, y problemas en tolerar situaciones e interacciones de día a día.

Los impedimentos en el aprendizaje pueden ocurrir en las siguientes áreas académicas:

1. Lenguaje hablado: Atrasos, trastornos, o discrepancias en el escuchar y hablar;
2. Lenguaje escrito: Dificultades en leer, escribir, y ortografía;
3. Aritmética: Dificultad en ejecutar funciones aritméticas o en comprender conceptos básicos;
4. Razonamiento: Dificultad en organizar e integrar los pensamientos; y
5. Habilidades para la organización: Dificultad en organizar todas las facetas del aprendizaje.

✧ Implicaciones Educacionales ✧

El Plan de Educación Individual (IEP) debe diseñarse detenidamente, puesto que los impedimentos en el aprendizaje se manifiestan en una variedad de comportamientos. Para la educación del niño con un impedimento en el aprendizaje es importante conducir todo el proceso de evaluación hasta el desarrollo del IEP con la colaboración de todos los profesores y los padres. Esta colaboración servirá para facilitar el desarrollo del niño con impedimentos en el aprendizaje.

Según algunos profesores, las siguientes estrategias han sido efectivas con algunos estudiantes que tienen impedimentos en el aprendizaje:

- Aprovechar las fortalezas del estudiante;
- Programa estructurado y expectaciones claras;
- El uso de frases cortas y vocabulario simple;
- Oportunidades para éxito en un ambiente de apoyo, a fin de ayudar a fomentar el amor propio;
- Flexibilidad en los procedimientos de la sala de clases (por ejemplo, el uso de grabadoras magnetofónicas para tomar notas y pruebas, para los estudiantes que tienen dificultades con el lenguaje escrito);
- El uso de materiales que permiten la correción propia, sin que el niño sienta vergüenza;
- El uso de computadores para instrucción y práctica y para enseñanza en el uso del procesador de palabras;
- Fortalecimiento positivo de destrezas apropiadas en la escuela y hogar; y
- El reconocimiento de que los estudiantes con impedimentos en el aprendizaje pueden beneficiarse de el tiempo para crecer y madurar.

✧ Recursos ✧

Silver, L. (1991). *The misunderstood child: A guide for parents of children with learning disabilities* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill. (Ponerse en contacto con: TAB Books, Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17294. Teléfono: 1-800-262-4729. Precio: $9.95.)

Smith, S.L. (1981). *No easy answers: The learning disabled child.* New York: Bantam. (Ponerse en contacto con: Bantam, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103. Teléfono: 1-800-223-6834. Precio: $4.95.)

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